

ISO 14001 DEFINITIONS (3.0)

The definition section of ISO 14001 provides the foundation of the entire standard. They need to be understood by any organization intending to establish an environmental management system.

"3.1 -- Continual Improvement

Process of enhancing the environmental management system to achieve improvements in overall environmental performance in line with the organization's environmental policy.

NOTE -- The process need not take place in all areas of activity simultaneously."

The requirement that the environmental policy include a commitment to continual improvement highlights the importance of this definition. This definition applies strictly to the operation of the environmental management system. It does not apply to environmental performance. It is assumed that if the organization continually improves its environmental management system that environmental performance will continually improve.

"3.2 -- Environment

Surroundings in which an organization operates, including air, water, land, natural resources, flora, fauna, humans, and their interrelation.

NOTE -- Surroundings in this context extend from within an organization to the global system."

This definition provides the scope of the environmental management system. Note that it includes the environment (air, water, land, flora, fauna and humans), and it includes natural resources. This means that energy and raw materials must be considered within the environmental management system. This definition does not include the need to add the areas of safety and/or industrial hygiene within the environmental management system.

"3.3 -- Environmental Aspect

Element of an organization's activities, products or services that can interact with the environment.

NOTE -- A significant environmental aspect is an environmental aspect that has or can have a significant environmental impact."

This is a definition that cuts a large path in its application within the standard. The important word within the definition is "interact". This implies either a positive, neutral or negative impact. This approach leads to the potential for a large listing of environmental aspects from which significant environmental aspects can be drawn for consideration as environmental objectives.

"3.4 -- Environmental Impact

Any change to the environment, whether adverse or beneficial, wholly or partially resulting from an organization's activities, products or services."

The present and potential impact of every environmental aspect should be evaluated. The combination of the environmental aspect and environmental impact is the important first step in determining the significance of an environmental aspect.

"3.5 -- Environmental Management System

The part of the overall management system that includes organizational structure, planning activities, responsibilities, practices, procedures, processes and resources for developing, implementing, achieving, reviewing and maintaining the environmental policy."

No additional discussion required.

"3.6 -- Environmental Management System Audit

A systematic and documented verification process of objectively obtaining and evaluating evidence to determine whether an organization's environmental management system conforms to the environmental management system audit criteria set by the organization, and for communication of the results of this process to management."

The process of verifying that policies, procedures and instructions that constitute the environmental management system are being followed at all appropriate levels of the organization.

"3.7 -- Environmental Objective

Overall environmental goal, arising from the environmental policy, that an organization sets itself to achieve, and which is quantifiable where practicable."

These are the specific goals that are necessary to implement the environmental policy. There should be a correlation between the list of significant environmental aspect(s) and the environmental objective(s). The environmental objective should be quantifiable and measurable.

"3.8 -- Environmental Performance

Measurable results of the environmental management system, related to an organization's control of its environmental aspects, based upon its environmental policy, objective and targets."

No additional discussion required.

"3.9 -- Environmental Policy

Statement by the organization of its intentions and principles in relation to its overall environmental performance which provides a framework for action and for the setting of its environmental objectives and targets."

The entire environmental management system is designed to achieve the commitments of the environmental policy. It provides the framework for setting of the environmental objectives and targets. The process of developing the environmental policy should be based upon the significant environmental aspects. This process will ensure that the environmental objective(s) and targets(s) support the environmental policy.

"3.10 -- Environmental Target

Detailed performance requirement, quantified where practicable, applicable to the organization or parts thereof, that arises from the environmental objectives and that needs to be set and met in order to achieve those objectives."

An environmental target is a specific task in the achievement of an environmental objective. Environmental targets must be stated in a measurable and quantifiable manner.

"3.11 -- Interested Party

Individual or group concerned with or affected by the environmental performance of an organization."

The organization will need to have a process in place for communicating with the public, and to consider the interests of those individuals or groups that are affected by the organization's environmental performance.

"3.12 -- Organization

Company, corporation, firm, enterprise, authority or institution, or part or combination thereof, whether incorporated or not, public or private, that has its own functions and administration.

NOTE -- For organizations with more than one operating unit, a single operating unit may be defined as an organization."

No additional discussion required.

"3.13 -- Prevention of Pollution"

Use of processes, practices, materials or products that avoid, reduce or control pollution, which may include recycling, treatment, process changes, control mechanisms, efficient use of resources and material substitution.

NOTE -- The potential benefits of prevention of pollution include the reduction of adverse environmental impacts, improved efficiency and reduced costs."

The organization must commit to review and include, where appropriate, the above listed techniques, in the development and implementation of its environmental objective(s) and targets(s).

Non-ISO 14001 Definitions

The following definitions are included in order to avoid confusion.

Conformance

The condition or fact of being in harmony or agreement; correspondence; congruity; similarity.

Compliance

Complying, or giving in to a request, demand, wish, etc. Also--in compliance with, in accordance with.

Please note that conformance is a term that is used with ISO 14001. Compliance is a term that is associated with command and control activities such as environmental laws.